IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

DANIEL ROY SMITH, Plaintiff, v. OSMON, et al., Defendants.	No. 2:22-CV-1637-WBS-DMC-P ORDER

Plaintiff, a prisoner proceeding pro se, brings this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Pending before the Court is Plaintiff's first amended complaint, ECF No. 14.

The Court is required to screen complaints brought by prisoners seeking relief against a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). This provision also applies if the plaintiff was incarcerated at the time the action was initiated even if the litigant was subsequently released from custody. See Olivas v. Nevada ex rel. Dep't of Corr., 856 F.3d 1281, 1282 (9th Cir. 2017). The Court must dismiss a complaint or portion thereof if it: (1) is frivolous or malicious; (2) fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted; or (3) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1), (2). Moreover, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure require that complaints contain a ". . . short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). This means that claims must be stated simply,

concisely, and directly. See McHenry v. Renne, 84 F.3d 1172, 1177 (9th Cir. 1996) (referring to Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(e)(1)). These rules are satisfied if the complaint gives the defendant fair notice of the plaintiff's claim and the grounds upon which it rests. See Kimes v. Stone, 84 F.3d 1121, 1129 (9th Cir. 1996). Because Plaintiff must allege with at least some degree of particularity overt acts by specific defendants which support the claims, vague and conclusory allegations fail to satisfy this standard. Additionally, it is impossible for the Court to conduct the screening required by law when the allegations are vague and conclusory.

I. PLAINTIFF'S ALLEGATIONS

Plaintiff is a prisoner at California Medical Facility (CMF) in Vacaville California. See ECF No. 14, pg. 1. Plaintiff lists the following as defendants: (1) Dr. Osmon, Chief Medical Executive at CMF; (2) Dr. Angie Hood-Medland, Primary Care Physician at CMF; (3) Deepak Mohan, M.D., Medical Director at San Joaquin General Hospital (SJGH); (4) Julie Torry Watkins, M.D., unknown position at SJGH; (5) Benson Chen, Resident at SJGH; (6) Aubrey Deponte, Registered Nurse at SJGH; and (7) Dr. John or Jane Doe, Neurologist at SJGH. See id. at 3-4. Plaintiff claims Defendants were deliberately indifferent to his medical care. See id. at 5.

Defendant Dr. Hood-Medland sent Plaintiff Smith to SJGH for a lumbar puncture, which was performed by Defendant Dr. Nikpour August 27, 2021. See id. According to Plaintiff, the procedure was botched as a result of Dr. Nikpour's alleged malpractice, causing Smith lasting damage including the need for a foley catheter and a wheelchair. See id. Plaintiff claims the catheter was "placed in wrongly." Id. at 6.

Plaintiff next states that, on September 1, 2021, he returned to SJGH, and Defendant Dr. Torry Watkins (or Dr. Watkin Torry, as stated in the body of the amended complaint) ordered Defendant Resident Chen (also referred to as Chen Do) to place a foley catheter. See id. at 6. Chen/Do was assisted by Defendant Resident Nurse Deponte. See id. The catheter caused Smith pain for twenty-four hours and had to be replaced twice at SJGH. See id. When Smith returned to CMF, Defendant Dr. Hood-Medland ordered it replaced again. Id.

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Finally, Plaintiff claims that Defendant Dr. Mohan is a supervisor at SJGH and Dr. Osomon is a supervisor at CMF and that they are liable as supervisors for the conduct of the staff under them. See id. at 6-7.

II. DISCUSSION

Plaintiff's claims are not currently cognizable because he does not allege that Defendants acted with the purpose of inflicting harm and because Plaintiff's claims appear to assert negligence. Further, Defendants Dr. Osmon and Dr. Deepak cannot be held liable for the actions of their staff.

A. Medical Claim

The treatment a prisoner receives in prison and the conditions under which the prisoner is confined are subject to scrutiny under the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. See Helling v. McKinney, 509 U.S. 25, 31 (1993); Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832 (1994). The Eighth Amendment ". . . embodies broad and idealistic concepts of dignity, civilized standards, humanity, and decency." Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 102 (1976). Conditions of confinement may, however, be harsh and restrictive. See Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981). Nonetheless, prison officials must provide prisoners with "food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, medical care, and personal safety." Toussaint v. McCarthy, 801 F.2d 1080, 1107 (9th Cir. 1986). A prison official violates the Eighth Amendment only when two requirements are met: (1) objectively, the official's act or omission must be so serious such that it results in the denial of the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities; and (2) subjectively, the prison official must have acted unnecessarily and wantonly for the purpose of inflicting harm. See Farmer, 511 U.S. at 834. Thus, to violate the Eighth Amendment, a prison official must have a "sufficiently culpable mind." See id.

Deliberate indifference to a prisoner's serious illness or injury, or risks of serious injury or illness, gives rise to a claim under the Eighth Amendment. See Estelle, 429 U.S. at 105; see also Farmer, 511 U.S. at 837. This applies to physical as well as dental and mental health needs. See Hoptowit v. Ray, 682 F.2d 1237, 1253 (9th Cir. 1982). An injury or illness is

sufficiently serious if the failure to treat a prisoner's condition could result in further significant injury or the ". . . unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain." McGuckin v. Smith, 974 F.2d 1050, 1059 (9th Cir. 1992); see also Doty v. County of Lassen, 37 F.3d 540, 546 (9th Cir. 1994). Factors indicating seriousness are: (1) whether a reasonable doctor would think that the condition is worthy of comment; (2) whether the condition significantly impacts the prisoner's daily activities; and (3) whether the condition is chronic and accompanied by substantial pain. See Lopez v. Smith, 203 F.3d 1122, 1131-32 (9th Cir. 2000) (en banc).

The requirement of deliberate indifference is less stringent in medical needs cases than in other Eighth Amendment contexts because the responsibility to provide inmates with medical care does not generally conflict with competing penological concerns. See McGuckin, 974 F.2d at 1060. Thus, deference need not be given to the judgment of prison officials as to decisions concerning medical needs. See Hunt v. Dental Dep't, 865 F.2d 198, 200 (9th Cir. 1989). The complete denial of medical attention may constitute deliberate indifference. See Toussaint v. McCarthy, 801 F.2d 1080, 1111 (9th Cir. 1986). Delay in providing medical treatment, or interference with medical treatment, may also constitute deliberate indifference. See Lopez, 203 F.3d at 1131. Where delay is alleged, however, the prisoner must also demonstrate that the delay led to further injury. See McGuckin, 974 F.2d at 1060.

Negligence in diagnosing or treating a medical condition does not, however, give rise to a claim under the Eighth Amendment. See Estelle, 429 U.S. at 106. Moreover, a difference of opinion between the prisoner and medical providers concerning the appropriate course of treatment does not give rise to an Eighth Amendment claim. See Jackson v. McIntosh, 90 F.3d 330, 332 (9th Cir. 1996).

Plaintiff pleads that his lumbar procedure was "botched." To plead a cognizable claim, Plaintiff must allege Defendants acted unnecessarily and wantonly for the purpose of inflicting harm. See Farmer, 511 U.S. at 834. Plaintiff does not do so, and the facts suggest that, to the contrary, Defendants acted to alleviate his suffering following a procedure allegedly gone awry. From all appearances, Plaintiff's claims are based on negligence and not deliberate indifference. Plaintiff will be provided leave to amend.

B. Supervisor Liability

Supervisory personnel are generally not liable under § 1983 for the actions of their employees. See Taylor v. List, 880 F.2d 1040, 1045 (9th Cir. 1989) (holding that there is no respondeat superior liability under § 1983). A supervisor is only liable for the constitutional violations of subordinates if the supervisor participated in or directed the violations. See id. The Supreme Court has rejected the notion that a supervisory defendant can be liable based on knowledge and acquiescence in a subordinate's unconstitutional conduct because government officials, regardless of their title, can only be held liable under § 1983 for his or her own conduct and not the conduct of others. See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 676 (2009). Supervisory personnel who implement a policy so deficient that the policy itself is a repudiation of constitutional rights and the moving force behind a constitutional violation may, however, be liable even where such personnel do not overtly participate in the offensive act. See Redman v. Cnty of San Diego, 942 F.2d 1435, 1446 (9th Cir. 1991) (en banc).

When a defendant holds a supervisory position, the causal link between such defendant and the claimed constitutional violation must be specifically alleged. See Fayle v. Stapley, 607 F.2d 858, 862 (9th Cir. 1979); Mosher v. Saalfeld, 589 F.2d 438, 441 (9th Cir. 1978). Vague and conclusory allegations concerning the involvement of supervisory personnel in civil rights violations are not sufficient. See Ivey v. Board of Regents, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982). "[A] plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official's own individual actions, has violated the constitution." Iqbal, 662 U.S. at 676.

According to Plaintiff, Defendants Dr. Osmon and Dr. Deepak had no personal involvement with the Plaintiff. Because they cannot be held liable under § 1983 for the actions of their staff, Plaintiff does not present state cognizable claims against them. See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 676 (2009). Plaintiff will be provided leave to amend.

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III. CONCLUSION

Because it is possible that the deficiencies identified in this order may be cured by amending the complaint, Plaintiff is entitled to leave to amend prior to dismissal of the entire action. See Lopez v. Smith, 203 F.3d 1122, 1126, 1131 (9th Cir. 2000) (en banc). Plaintiff is informed that, as a general rule, an amended complaint supersedes the original complaint. See Ferdik v. Bonzelet, 963 F.2d 1258, 1262 (9th Cir. 1992). Thus, following dismissal with leave to amend, all claims alleged in the original complaint which are not alleged in the amended complaint are waived. See King v. Atiyeh, 814 F.2d 565, 567 (9th Cir. 1987). Therefore, if Plaintiff amends the complaint, the Court cannot refer to the prior pleading in order to make Plaintiff's amended complaint complete. See Local Rule 220. An amended complaint must be complete in itself without reference to any prior pleading. See id.

If Plaintiff chooses to amend the complaint, Plaintiff must demonstrate how the conditions complained of have resulted in a deprivation of Plaintiff's constitutional rights. See Ellis v. Cassidy, 625 F.2d 227 (9th Cir. 1980). The complaint must allege in specific terms how each named defendant is involved, and must set forth some affirmative link or connection between each defendant's actions and the claimed deprivation. See May v. Enomoto, 633 F.2d 164, 167 (9th Cir. 1980); Johnson v. Duffy, 588 F.2d 740, 743 (9th Cir. 1978).

Finally, Plaintiff is warned that failure to file an amended complaint within the time provided in this order may be grounds for dismissal of this action. See Ferdik, 963 F.2d at 1260-61; see also Local Rule 110. Plaintiff is also warned that a complaint which fails to comply with Rule 8 may, in the Court's discretion, be dismissed with prejudice pursuant to Rule 41(b). See Nevijel v. North Coast Life Ins. Co., 651 F.2d 671, 673 (9th Cir. 1981).

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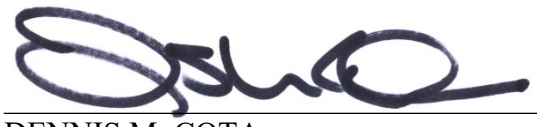
Accordingly, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

1. Plaintiff's first complaint is dismissed with leave to amend; and

2. Plaintiff shall file a second amended complaint within 30 days of the date of service of this order.

Dated: August 18, 2023



DENNIS M. COTA
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE